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INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND NEA/IPA; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR;
TREASURY FOR AHERN
DEPT PLEASE PASS TO USAID FOR ANE/MEA: MCCLOUD/BORODIN
JOINT STAFF FOR LTGEN SELVA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: HEBRONITES LAY OUT PRIORITIES TO EASE MOVEMENT
RESTRICTIONS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Hebron's Mayor and business leaders told ConGenOffs that GOI restrictions on movement and access continue to stifle the city, particularly in Hebron's Old City and the Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of Machpela area. Though two key road obstacle removals last year facilitated commercial and passenger vehicle movement, the Mayor and local businessmen said that much more needs to be done, including removing key roadblocks north and south of the city and critical checkpoints/roadblocks in the city center. End summary.

Last Year's Roadblock Removals Good for Business

¶2. (SBU) In a series of recent meetings with Hebron Mayor Khaled Osaily and prominent Hebron businessmen, all confirmed that two key roadblock removals last year had a significant positive impact on the city's businesses and residents. They said that removing the two obstacles -- one at Halhul Bridge in northern Nablus that blocked access to the region's main east-west highway (Route 35), and one at al-Fahs/Kvasim ("Sheep's Junction") that blocked access from the city's industrial zone to the West Bank's main north-south highway (Route 60) -- allowed businesses more direct access to major commercial arteries. They also reduced travel time around the city for hundreds of thousands of residents.

Old City Checkpoints "Devastating"

¶3. (SBU) Mayor Osaily told ConGenOffs that roadblocks cutting off access to Hebron's former central shopping district around Shuhada Street in the Old City resulted in the closure of about 1,600 Palestinian shops, turning the area into "a ghost town." He said that central Hebron road closures, curfews, and daily confrontations with local settlers have had a "devastating" impact on the Old City business district.

Tsion Road: GOI Buckles to Settlers

¶4. (SBU) Mayor Osaily lamented that the GOI backtracked on plans to allow Palestinian access to Tsion Road, the main thoroughfare between the Kiryat Arba settlement and the Ibrahimi Mosque/Cave of Machpela area, due to strong resistance from the local settler community. He called May 18, when settlers marched to protest the planned opening, "a dangerous day." "The city was on the verge of a fire, just waiting for a spark," said the Mayor. He said he would

continue to press the GOI to open the road, calling it "significant for social and religious reasons."

Beit Haggay and Farsh al-Hawa Roadblocks Also Top Priorities

15. (SBU) Mayor Osaily and business contacts cited two road obstacles on Hebron's outskirts, Beit Haggay and Farsh al-Hawa, as two top priorities for removal. Mayor Osaily estimated that the Beit Haggay roadblock (on route 60 near the Haggay settlement) prevents nearly 200,000 Palestinians living in towns and villages south of Hebron from accessing the city via route 60. Business leaders said that Hebron's major industries, including concrete, stone and marble, and foodstuffs, are hurt by this closure. According to Mayor Osaily, the Beit Haggay roadblock cannot be justified on security grounds, since several roundabout alternative routes exist. "It's only purpose is to make our lives difficult."

16. (SBU) The Mayor said that removing Farsh al-Hawa roadblock in northwest Hebron is another priority. This roadblock, said the Mayor, prevents businesses and residents in northwest Hebron from directly accessing Route 35, which connects that part of the city to the Tarqumiya crossing into Israel and to Route 60.

WALLES